

Healthy Eating is Good for the Soul

Issue

There are more than 50 African-American churches in Williamsburg County. Within these church congregations, men, women and youth suffer silently from hypertension, diabetes, heart disease and obesity. Greater St. Mark A.M.E. Church in Hemingway, South Carolina has many parishioners who daily battle these chronic conditions. The Church's Health and Wellness Committee, with the support of their Pastor, saw the need to help.

Williamsburg County residents suffer much higher rates for risk factors that lead to chronic disease conditions. In South Carolina, 65 percent of the population is overweight, and Williamsburg County's rate is 68 percent. In Williamsburg County, 30 percent of the population leads a sedentary lifestyle, while South Carolina's rate is 26 percent.

Intervention

The South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) has partnered with the National Cancer Institute to train Health Ministries in Williamsburg County on Body & Soul, a curriculum that emphasizes healthy eating and consumptions of fruits and vegetables on a daily basis. The training was provided by DHEC in January 2007, and additional technical support continues as needed.

Since the inception of this program, DHEC Region 6 has accomplished:

- Partnerships with local churches to provide four Body & Soul Trainings;
- Technical assistance on as needed basis and follow-up with Health Ministries quarterly to provide resources; and
- Participation in local churches' health fairs and distribution of nutritional information.

Impact

Greater St. Mark A.M.E. Church and its Health and Wellness Ministry have been able to assist parishioners to increase healthy eating at all church functions and to be physically active at least three times a week. Furthermore, the pastor has agreed to sign a Healthy Eating Policy to improve the health of its members. Church members continue to:

- Participate in an annual Heart Health Walk, held in May; where more than 30 parishioners and friends take part;
- Provide nutritious snacks for parishioners every Sunday; and
- Provide free quarterly blood pressure checks.

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